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1885

About the Worthiest
of the Year.

E. P. Armstrong.

ABOUT THE
DEATH-BED OF THE YEAR.

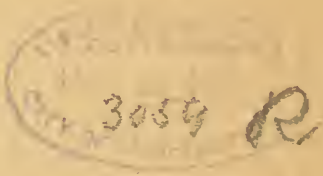
A CHRISTMAS TIDE MOSAIC,

—BY—

✓
E. C. ARMSTRONG.
..

NEW YORK,
December 25th, 1885.

PILLSBURY:
Manufacturing Stationer and Printer,
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IN MEMORIAM.

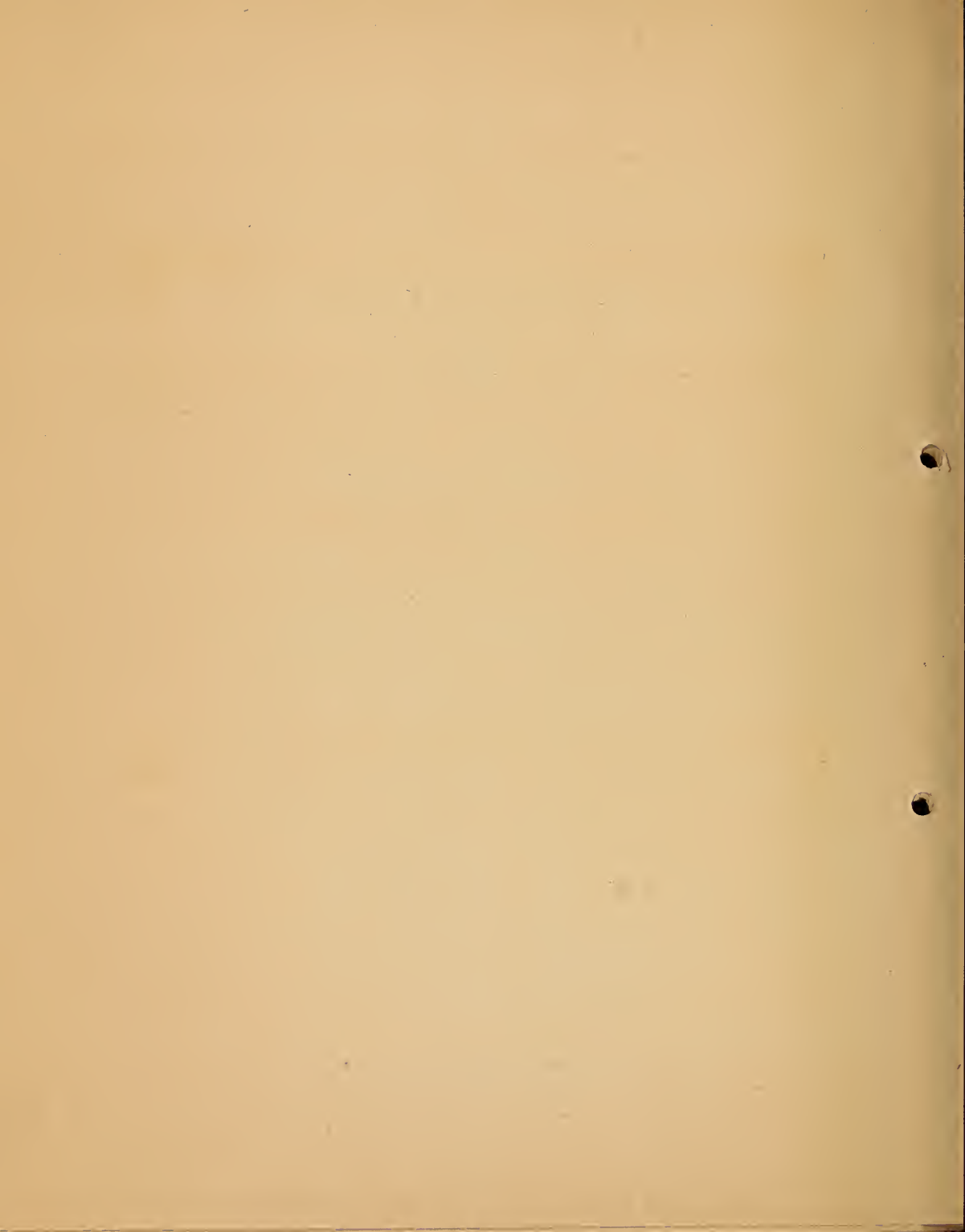
M. A. MCN.

DIED

SEPTEMBER 16, 1882.



LAY upon thy grave this wreath of song,
Dear, faithful, loving heart,
Whose love for me so tender was, and strong.
To thee my soul's first melodies belong.
Into my life thy gentle presence came
With God-sent love, a purifying flame,
And never can depart.



I.

WHILE firesides blush and nature's fair face pales
With snow at Christmas tide,
The heart grows warm, though beat upon by gales,
And man to man the better self unveils
In gifts, which imitate in miniature
His gift who gave to make the vilest pure,
And for his purpose died.

II.

IN this mosaic of a modest muse
No gorgeous tints are wrought,
But prayers and wishes lend their love-lit hues
And faith in human kind the whole imbues.
One who is forced at times to sing, would lay
Among the costlier gifts on New-year's day
These crystals of his thought.

III.

THROW across the dead year's breast a chain,
Woven in links of rhyme,
Of flowerets grown in sunshine, mist, and rain,
Upon the border-land of heart and brain,
Then pass to drop the buds of hope and prayer
Upon the new-born face, divinely fair,
Of the next child of time.

IV.

ABOUT the death-bed of the year, no wail
Of weeping sorrow sounds,
For we who watch his vital forces fail,
Have lately by a manger cried: "All hail
The infant Prince of Peace and Lord of Light,
Who comes to dissipate the brooding night
Where human sin abounds!"

V.

NOT with the mirth of players on the stage,
Who wait the prompter's bell
To act their parts of mimic love or rage,
In youth assumed, or counterfeited age,
But with the soldier hearts of those who know
To-morrow's march may meet the drawn-up foe,
We wait the old year's knell.

VI.

SHALL we not kneel in resolute array,
And bid all jesting cease,
As covenanters knelt of old to pray,
Before their swords were stained in bloody fray?
They prayed the God of battles, but the name
That fanned their courage to its fearless flame,
Was Jesus, Prince of Peace.

VII.

BENEATH the banner of His love we fight,
And in the battle's roar,
March on to put the sin He hates to flight
To speed the dawn, to drive away the night.
A growing likeness to the risen Lord,
Is for the faithful soul its best reward
Both now and evermore.

VIII.

WITH faces lightward, shadows backward fall
On paths of sorrow trod.
Upon our ears there falls the bugle call
To battle with the sins that would enthrall.
The scarred survivors of a warlike past,
We face fresh fights, but victors at the last
Shall we ascend to God.

IX.

THE sin fought down is prophet of the time

When we shall sin no more,

When solid rock shall take the place of slime,
When slipping feet shall learn at last to climb.

We imitate that life of gain from loss

Which lay between a manger and a cross,

A desert and a shore.

X.

SHALL I insert the bright-hued wish that pain

May never shadow throw?

The dark-robed angel never comes in vain.

A chosen messenger is he to train,

And to a better growth the soul confine,

As gardeners sharply cut and trim a vine,

'That it may fruitful grow.

XI.

WHEN dare I wish his presence in the year?
Not that, not that be mine!

Whene'er his hand brought forth the sigh or tear,
My heart would sink in sudden pang of fear,
"Perchance my prayer is answered in the blows."
So, let it be with Him who only knows
When best to trim the vine.

XII.

BUT speed the wish on airy pinions strong,
That, in the coming year,
Our feet, on flint or turf, may walk along
An upward path, and our faith be a song
That, lark-like leaving earth for sky,
Shall force an upward look from passers by
And chain their souls to hear.

XIII.

MAY those who, weary with the march of years,
Must still their vigils keep,
Be calm when love disguised as death appears,
And close the eyes that say good-bye to tears,
As a tired infant on its mother's breast
Is hushed by loving lullabies to rest
And sinks to dreamless sleep.

XIV.

THEY sink to sleep, but soon shall they arise
In forms more fair and bright
Than any beauty seen by earthly eyes,
Than any glory of the western skies.
Where dies the worn-out old, the new is born.
The setting sun is herald of the morn
Beyond the coming night.

XV.

MAY we who, toiling on, still watch the hours,
Each like a graver's tool,
Cut deep the sun that shines or storm that lowers,
Be blest with grace to quicken all our powers
And make us fit to finish well the task
That harder seems than human love would ask,
Through all our earthly school.

XVI.

AND still another prayer for that same grace,
In all our gayer scenes,
To glorify a firmly radiant face
And with our mirthful hours keep steady pace.
Have we not cause to know that careless glee
May often have its end in gayety
That unto folly leans?

XVII.

SO, keeping faith to Him who keepeth us,

Our rough-hewn blocks of time,

In manner seeming strange, miraculous,
Shall rise into a building glorious;

Without, the guarded gate and moated wall;

Within, a temple's arches wide and tall;

Above, the sounding chime.

XVIII.

ABOUT this temple-fortress of our life,

While peals or tolls its bell,

And marshalled moments march, in peace or strife,
To tuneful flute or warlike drum and fife,

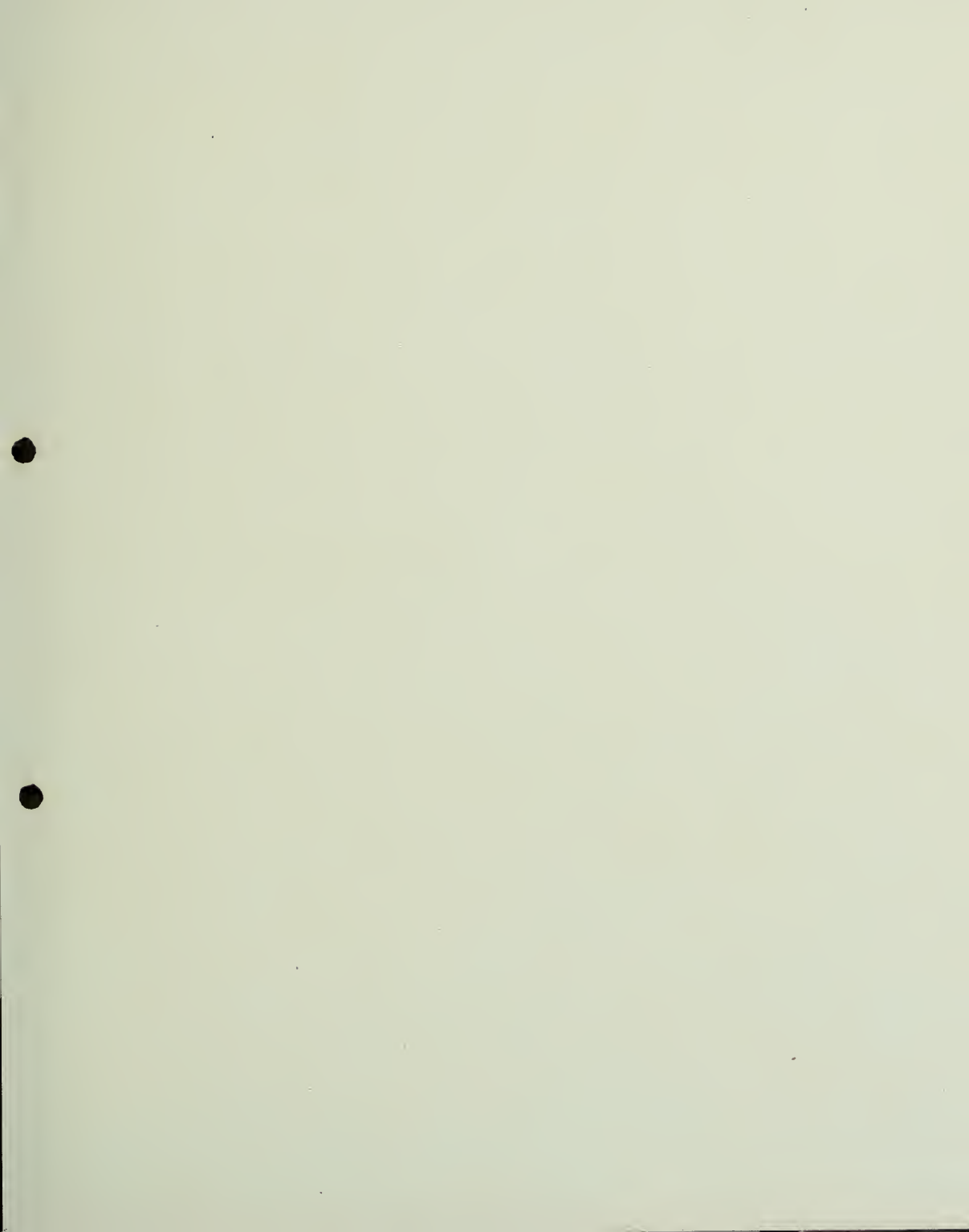
Still shall each passing hour cry clear and bold,

As city watchmen did in nights of old,

“All’s well! All’s well! All’s well!”

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